

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 MCT-01 IO-13 HA-05 AID-05 SY-05 PC-01

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-----044801 181719Z /43

R 181455Z JAN 78

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5402

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY QUITO

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY MEXICO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 0219

E.O. 11653: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, NU, SHUM

SUBJECT: CHAMORRO ASSASSINATION: THE ASSASSINS CONFESS BUT OPPOSITION
DENOUNCES COVER-UP

SUMMARY: THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING THE IDENTITY OF THE PERSON(S)
BEHIND THE ASSASSINATION OF LA PRENSA EDITOR PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO
HAS NOT BEEN DISPELLED BY THE STATEMENTS OF THE ASSASSINS IN OPEN
COURT. LA PRENSA HAS REJECTED THE TESTIMONY OF THE ASSASSINS' RING-
LEADER SILVIO PENA NAMING ONLY AMCIT PEDRO RAMOS AS THE PERSON WHO
HIRED THEM TO KILL CHAMORRO AND HAS DENOUNCED A COVER-UP. OPPOSITION
CRITICS ARE UNLIKELY TO BE SATISFIED WITH ANYTHING LESS THAN FINDINGS
IMPLICATING CLOSE SOMOZA COLLABORATORS IN THE ASSASSINATION. END
SUMMARY

1. SILVIO PENA RIVAS, HAROLD CEDENO AGUIRRE, SILVIO VEGA ZUNIGA, AND
DOMINGO ACEVEDO CHAVARRIA, ALL IMPLICATED IN THE ASSASSINATION OF LA
PRENSA EDITOR PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO ON JAN 10, CONFESSED THEIR
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PARTICIPATION IN THE ASSASSINATION IN OPEN TESTIMONY IN THE MANAGUA
POLICE COURT ON JAN 13 AND 14. THEIR TESTIMONY WAS BROADCAST LIVE BY
MANAGUA RADIO STATIONS AND HAS DOMINATED MASS MEDIA NEWS COVERAGE.
PENA TESTIFIED JAN 13 THAT HE HAD RECEIVED THE EQUIVALENT OF US
\$14,300 FROM AMCIT PEDRO RAMOS, GENERAL MANAGER OF THE PLAS-
MAPHERESIS BLOOD PLASMA ENTERPRISE, TO ASSASSINATE CHAMORRO. HE
DENIED HAVING HAD DIRECT PARTICIPATION IN THE ASSASSINATION, SAYING

THAT HE HAD SERVED AS INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN RAMOS AND THE PERSONS WHO ACTUALLY COMMITTED THE CRIME. FROM MIAMI, RAMOS DENIED HAVING HAD ANY PARTICIPATION IN THE CRIME, OR EVEN KNOWING PENA, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF HAVING MET HIM. RAMOS SAID THAT PENA WAS PROTECTING SOMEONE ELSE AND THAT HE WOULD NOT RETURN TO NICARAGUA UNTIL HE COULD HAVE GUARANTEES BECAUSE OF QUOTE, THE STATE OF COLLECTIVE HYSTERIA AGAINST ME, UNQUOTE. ON JAN 15 LA PRENSA PUBLISHED AN INTERVIEW WITH THE EMPLOYEES OF THE DEPARTMENT STORE WHERE PENA HAD WORKED AS SALES MANAGER WHERE THEY STATED THAT THEY HAD SEEN PENA AND RAMOS TALKING IN ENGLISH IN THE FIRST WEEK OF DECEMBER 1977.

2. VEGA, CEDENO, AND ACEVEDO TESTIFIED JAN 14. IN HIS STATEMENT, VEGA, WHO WEPT THROUGHOUT HIS TESTIMONY, SAID THAT REMORSE FOR HIS PART IN THE ASSASSINATION HAD LED HIM TO CONFESS HIS PARTICIPATION TO THE POLICE. HE CONFESSED TO HAVING DRIVEN ONE OF THE ASSASIN'S CARS, AND NAMED ACEVEDO AS THE ACTUAL KILLER. HE SAID THAT PENA HAD OFFERED HIM THE EQUIVALENT OF US\$2,140 FOR HIS PART IN THE CRIME AND A HOUSE FROM THE NICARAGUAN

HOUSING INSTITUTE (INVI), WHERE PENA CLAIMED TO HAVE INFLUENCE WITH A QUOTE BIG MAN UNQUOTE. THE NAMES OF CORNELIO HUECK, THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES AND FAUSTO ZELAYA, PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSING BANK (BAVINIC) UNTIL DEC 1977, CAME TO LIGHT IN VEGA'S TESTIMONY. ACCORDING TO VEGA, WHEN HE EXPRESSED SOME FEARS TO PENA, PENA TOLD HIM NOT TO WORRY BECAUSE IF HE WERE CAUGHT, HUECK OR ZELAYA COULD PROVIDE TWENTY OR CONFIDENTIAL

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THIRTY LAWYERS TO DEFEND HIM. (COMMENT: RUMORS THAT HUECK, ZELAYA, AND PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S SON, MAJOR ANASTASIO SOMOZA PORTOCARRERO WERE INVOLVED IN THE ASSASSINATION OF CHAMORRO HAVE BEEN RIFE IN THE LAST DAYS. APPARENTLY ACTING ON THESE RUMORS, CONSERVATIVE SENATOR RUAL ARANA MONTALVAN CALLED FOR A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE SENATE TO INVESTIGATE THE PARTICIPATION OF MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, AN INDIRECT BUT UNMISTAKABLE REFERENCE TO HEUCK. HUECK WAS QUOTED IN LA PENSAS OF JAN 14 AS DENYING ANY PARTICIPATION IN THE CRIME AND THREATENING VIOLENCE AGAINST ANYONE WHO TRIED TO IMPLICATE HIM. END COMMENT.) ACEVEDO INITIALLY CONFESSED HAVING KILLED CHAMORRO, BUT LATER RETRACTED HIS TESTIMONY, SAYING THAT VEGA WAS THE ONE WHO FIRED AT CHAMORRO.

3. THE CHAMORRO FAMILY NEWSPAPER LA PRENSA HAS REJECTED THE PENA TESTIMONY NAMING RAMOS AS THE MAN BEHIND THE ASSASSINATION. UNDER THE BANNER HEADLINE QUOTE, THEY LIE AND COVER UP, UNQUOTE, LA PRENSA OF JAN 14 QUESTIONED SEVERAL ASPECTS OF PENA'S TESTIMONY AND OF THE INVESTIGATION. LA PRENSA POINTED OUT THAT THE AUTHORITIES HAD PENA'S CONFESSION SINCE WEDNESDAY JAN 11, BUT THAT THERE WAS NO OFFICIAL STATEMENT UNTIL FRIDAY JAN 13 AND THAT IT HAD BECOME KNOWN UNOFFICIALLY THAT THOSE WHO ORDERED DR. CHAMORRO KILLED WERE SEVERAL PERSONS AND HAD RAISED THE EQUIVALENT OF US\$714,000 TO

FINANCE THE ASSASSINATION. THE ARTICLE ALSO RAISED THE QUESTION OF
LARGE SUMS OF MONEY SPENT BY PENA IN MONTHS PRECEDING THE ASSASINATIO
N
AND NOTED CONTRADICITIONS IN HIS TESTIMONY. THE SAME ISSUE OF LA
PRENSA GAVE PROMINENT COVERAGE TO RAMOS' DENIAL, AND TO AN ALLEGATION
THAT PENA HAD VISITED IN DEC 1977 THE LOMA DE TISCAPA (WHERE THE
NATIONAL GUARD HEADQUARTERS ARE LOCATED). THE NEWSPAPER ALSO WARNED
THAT IT WOULD NOT ACCEPT THE SUICIDE OR DEATH WHILE TRYING TO ESCAPE
OF ANY OF THE PRISONERS IMPLICATED IN THE ASSASSINATION.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANAGUA 0219

4. OPINION AMONG LEADERS OF THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION
AND PRIVATE SECTOR PERSONALITIES IS ALMOST UNANIMOUS IN REJECTING
VIEW THAT RAMOS IS ONLY PERSON BEHIND CHAMORRO'S ASSASSINATION.
MOST EXPRESSED VIEW THAT GON IS COVERING UP FOR REAL CULPRITS, WHO
ARE BELIEVED TO BE HIGH GOVERNMENT OR MILITARY OFFICIALS OR EVEN
MEMBERS OF PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S IMMEDIATE FAMILY. IN A STATEMENT
ISSUED JAN 16 THE NICARAGUAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MADE KNOWN ITS
DISSATISFACTION WITH THE QUOTE VACILLATING AND CONTRDICTORY MANNER
UNQUOTE IN WHICH THE INVESTIGATION HAS BEEN CONDUCTED. DISSATISFAC-
TION WITH THE INVESTIGATION IS SHARED BY AT LEAST ONE HIGH RANKING
MEMBER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY, WHO IN PREVATE CONVERSATION WITH
EMBOFF SUGGESTED THE NEED FOR AN IMPARTIAL, INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGA-
TION.

5. COMMENT: OPPOSITION CRITICS ARE UNLIKELY TO BE SATISFIED WITH

ANYTHING LESS THAN FINDINGS IMPLICATING CLOSE SOMOZA COLLABORATORS
IN CHAMORRO'S ASSASSINATION. THESE CRITICS INTERPRET THE GON'S
FAILURE TO PRODUCE THE QUOTE REAL CULPRITS UNQUOTE AS EVIDENCE OF A
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COVER-UP AND PREDICT THAT POLITICAL TENSION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF
FURTHER VIOLENCE WILL NOT DIMINISH UNTIL THE FULL TRUTH IS KNOWN.
SINCE THE CRITICS' DEMANDS FOR MORE SATISFACTORY CULPRITS ARE UN-
LIKELY TO BE MET, EITHER BECAUSE RAMOS WAS INDEED THE MASTERMIND
OF THE ASSASSINATION, OR BECAUSE, AS SOME CHARGE, THE TRUE GUILTY
PARTIES ARE NOT EXPENDABLE, POLITICAL TENSIONS ARE LIKELY TO REMAIN
HIGH FOR SOME TIME AND IN ALL LIKELIHOOD THE BELIEF WILL ALWAYS
REMAIN THAT SOMOZA PROTECTED THE PERSONS WHO HAD CHAMORRO ASSASSINATE
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TAGS: PINS, PINT, SHUM, NU, (CHAMORRO, PEDRO JOAQUIN)
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